

Unclassified Paper

**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE**  
Newport, R.I.

**Applying Operational Art to Counterinsurgency  
Campaign Planning**

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College  
in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department  
of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views  
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14 June 1996

Paper directed by  
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Chairman, Joint Military Operations Department

19960815 087

Faculty Advisor

Date

DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED

UNCLASSIFIED

Security Classification This Page

## REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. Report Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
2. Security Classification Authority:			
3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule:			
4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.			
5. Name of Performing Organization: Joint Military Operations Department			
6. Office Symbol: 1C	7. Address: Naval War College, 686 Cushing Rd., Newport, RI 02841-1207		
8. Title (Include Security Classification): APPLYING OPERATIONAL ART TO COUNTERINSURGENCY CAMPAIGN PLANNING (UNCLASSIFIED)			
9. Personal Author(s): Richard W. LUEKING, Lieutenant Colonel, United States Marine Corps			
10. Type of Report: Final	11. Date of Report: 14 June 1996		
12. Page Count: 22			
13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.			
14. Ten key words that relate to your paper: insurgency counterinsurgency analysis force structure tenets value to JTF CinC			
15. Abstract: The challenge facing an JTF commander, on often more difficult and complex than conventional combat operations, is counterinsurgency planning and execution. His responsibility to plan and accomplish the strategic objective includes defeat or neutralization of any insurgency in his AOR. Counterinsurgency operations will complicate campaign planning and affect how the political, economic, cultural, and military objectives are approached and integrated. The commander must understand the tenets, conduct an accurate analysis, develop a competent plan, and build a tailored force to defeat the threat. All while coordinating with the diplomatic, economic, and social actions by the U.S. and the host country. The joint commander must plan for and be prepared to execute an effective counterinsurgency plan that applies the proper forces at the right time against the correct insurgency center of gravity. Achievement of the strategic objective and operational mission success hinge on it.			
16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract: UNLIMITED	Unclassified X	Same As Rpt	DTIC Users
18. Abstract Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
19. Name of Responsible Individual: Chairman, Joint Military Operations Department			
20. Telephone: (401) 841- <del>6461</del> 6461	21. Office Symbol: 1C		

## **ABSTRACT**

### **APPLYING OPERATIONAL ART TO COUNTERINSURGENCY CAMPAIGN PLANNING**

The challenge facing a JTF commander, one often more difficult and complex than conventional combat operations, is counterinsurgency planning and execution. These complications in execution are directly related to required political, economic, and military considerations during planning. When quickly scanning today's world-wide political environment, a joint commander will realize that military operations other than war are on the increase. His responsibility to plan and accomplish the strategic objective includes defeat or neutralization of any insurgency in his area of responsibility.

Counterinsurgency operations will complicate campaign planning and affect how the political, economic, cultural, and military objectives are approached and integrated. The commander must understand the tenets, conduct an accurate analysis, develop a competent plan, and build a tailored force to defeat or neutralize the threat all while coordinating with the diplomatic, economic, and social actions of the United States and the host country.

The joint commander must plan for and be prepared to execute an effective counterinsurgency plan that applies the proper forces at the right time against the correct insurgency center of gravity. Achievement of the strategic objective and the operational mission depend on it.

## **APPLYING OPERATIONAL ART TO COUNTERINSURGENCY CAMPAIGN PLANNING**

"...the most far reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature."

Carl Von Clausewitz  
On War<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

United States forces often provide invaluable training and advice to friendly governments threatened by subversion, lawlessness, or insurgency.<sup>2</sup> This training, delivered under the Foreign Internal Defense program, encompasses the total political, economic, and informational spectrums, and provides military support to another nation to assist in its fight against subversion and insurgency.<sup>3</sup>

As defined in Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Publication 1-02, "Counterinsurgency operations are those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency." The operational commander, in concert with the host nation or the existing government within an occupied country, must have a clear political aim and must develop a specific plan of attack to combat the insurgency. He must also have a clear understanding of the regional perspective and the strategic objective desired. The primary consideration is that in reality a military effort might not be the first priority or even required at all to defeat or neutralize an insurgency.

Secondly, if possible, any attempted counterinsurgency effort should be orchestrated by the host country and directly supported by the Joint Task Force (JTF). The JTF commander must understand that military involvement in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation is often controversial and not well received by the host nation; it should be a last resort. He must analyze the existing situation in the country, identify the political, economic, and military measures required to alleviate the cause of the insurgency and then request and develop the necessary military, diplomatic, and economic capabilities to attack it effectively. The JTF commander must request all aspects of U.S. power required to support the counterinsurgency operation. He may have been successful in the conduct of every conventional combat operation, but if the conflict regresses into an insurgency, or was initially an insurgency, without proper planning, he may ultimately fail in achieving the U.S. strategic objective.

### **Tenets**

Between peace and war is the ambiguous environment now referred to as Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). Insurgency and counterinsurgency are a significant part of this environment.<sup>4</sup> As the U.S. military involvement in MOOTW becomes more frequent and a predominant area of interest, a keen understanding of the root causes of an insurgency in an

area of responsibility and how to combat it becomes paramount in achieving the desired military and political end state.

The Operational Art approach to the application of insurgency analysis and effective counterinsurgency planning requires the joint commander to understand the basic tenets of an insurgency, conduct an accurate analysis, develop a complete plan, and build a force structure to defeat or neutralize the threat. This approach must focus on studying the insurgent's ends, means, vulnerabilities, and centers of gravity, and on friendly methods for gaining the initiative, exploiting success, and achieving an early victory.<sup>3</sup>

Counterinsurgency operations may not be the mission in which the operational commander and his JTF are best prepared or trained. During conventional type military operations with a resultant insurgency developing, or when a insurgency develops before combat operations are necessary, the commander must analyze the insurgency in detail and develop strategies and tactics to combat it. Each country is unique, with its own history, culture, preferences, and goals that result in a combination of problems different from those which exist in other nations.<sup>5</sup> Thought should be given to the fact that past lessons learned are not always applicable to the current situation. The commander will tend to mirror image that the people in the host nation hold the same values and expectations as do the people of the U.S. This mirror imaging

of host nation values will cause the JTF to incorrectly interpret the situation; this will adversely affect the development of plans, tactics, and force structure for counterinsurgency actions. The commander must make a complete and accurate analysis and determine the necessary operational planning requirements which fall into four distinctive areas: political, economic, cultural, and military. His efforts must be concentrated and directed toward the military and cultural aspect of insurgency resolution but in conjunction with United States and host government political and economic measures. Insurgency and counterinsurgency are environments in which political rather than military considerations predominate.<sup>6</sup> The military commander and his entire command will be required to assume a diplomatic as well as a military role.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of how well meaning the JTF intentions are in theory, consideration and planning must be given to the cultural impact of any intervention on the host country population. The objective must be to restore civil order, but the methods or means utilized must be applied with careful consideration to prevent or minimize negative reactions within the region.

### **Analyzing an Insurgency**

The operational commander will be burdened with the daunting task of making an accurate analysis of the insurgency's key factors. The insurgency objectives, issues,

grievances, and the desired end state must be gleaned from available intelligence. The impact and influence of previous insurgencies within the region or country and the outcomes, both good and bad, must be studied. Lessons learned should be applied, if possible, to the current situation. Of primary importance will be the socio-political background of the insurgent leadership and its ties to the populace. The commander must understand that an insurgency requires political legitimacy, political sophistication, both internal and external support, intelligence, and, most importantly, security.

Legitimacy is not a tangible asset, and is not easily quantified. Popular votes do not always confer or reflect legitimacy. Legitimacy derives from the peoples' perception that authority is genuine and effective. No group or military force can create legitimacy for itself; it must develop, encourage and sustain legitimacy by its actions. Legitimacy is a central concern to all parties directly and indirectly involved in a conflict.<sup>8</sup> Efforts to gain legitimacy for an insurgent cause can be both violent and non-violent in nature. Additionally, the insurgents may attempt to internationalize the conflict, thereby adding legitimacy to their cause and diminishing that of the host government or intervening force. The insurgents will also use coercion to advance their cause; this may include terrorism, guerrilla warfare, or conventional

military tactics. Any underlying currents hinting at problematic cultural, ethnic or religious issues will also require consideration during planning if U.S. and host nation legitimacy is to be maintained or enhanced.

The first major consideration is that the insurgents have unlimited objectives while the JTF will have limited objectives. This asymmetry in objectives will affect JTF planning and force structure determination. If possible, the insurgents will attempt to prevent the intervention of foreign forces, but if introduced, the insurgents will attempt to make the conflict costly and protracted. Historically, for example Vietnam, the intervening force has had an over reliance on military power and less effective use of political, economic, cultural, and country team efforts.

The commander must first analyze insurgent strategic, operational, and tactical objectives. The strategic objective will be the desired end state of taking over the government and how the insurgents will use the power when they achieve it. The operational objectives will be part of the overall process of destroying the government's political and military legitimacy and progressively establishing the insurgent's desired end state. Lastly, the tactical objectives will be the immediate aims to advance their cause, increase influence and establish and maintain legitimacy.<sup>9</sup>

The centers of gravity for the host country, the insurgents, and the JTF must be accurately determined so that an effective operational plan can be developed. The center of gravity of the host country may be the socio-political system or if no legitimate government exists, it could be whatever cultural, ethnic, or religious structure that does exist. The center of gravity for the insurgency is the leadership cadre and for the JTF it will be U.S. public opinion and the willingness of the U.S. people to support its actions. JTF intelligence sources must be developed to determine the scope and strength of the insurgency and create ways to combat it. The relationship between the government, the people, and the insurgency must be evaluated and methods and concepts developed to break the insurgent's ties with the people and strengthen the government's ties with the same. To effectively counter an insurgency the analysis must be timely and accurate, vulnerabilities must be discovered and exploitable, and success must be achievable by JTF forces. Most importantly, the operational plan must support the achievement of the strategic objectives.

### **Counterinsurgency Planning**

The primary planning consideration for the operational commander is to determine whether counterinsurgency military actions will contribute positively to the achievement of the strategic objective. Would continued or increased political

pressure, economic assistance, and additional resources by the United States or the host country establish legitimacy or achieve the strategic objectives without the introduction of military forces? These are key questions to be answered prior to military operations. The critical aspects of the counterinsurgency planning process are the determination of operational objectives and a detailed threat analysis. This threat analysis determines where enemy vulnerabilities and centers of gravity are and how they affect friendly force organization and the concept of their employment over time to achieve the desired end state.<sup>10</sup>

The commander must develop proposed lines of operations that begin at the non-physical level and progress through psychological, economic, social, political, and, in the last phase, physical intervention. Non-combat and combat operational objectives must be determined. They, in turn, must support the strategic objective and tie the JTF plan to tactical actions in support of these objectives. Emphasis on JTF force training, preparation and involvement will stress the conduct of unconventional military actions, small unit tactics, reliance on country teams for human intelligence, and mobile training teams to train host nation military to address the insurgency. A thorough analysis of the situation within the host country is required. The JTF commander must identify the measures required to eliminate insurgent issues and

grievances, and develop and coordinate both political and military capabilities within the host country to defeat the insurgency.

Political and social intervention measures include a national campaign plan to ease problems, establish agrarian reform if required, increase employment, supply vital services, and ensure human rights, all of which enable the government to rebuild and prepare to combat the insurgency on a police or military level. An important planning consideration is that many nationals will react strongly and negatively to outside military intervention. By choosing this course of action, the U.S. government, although with good intentions, may drive the people into supporting the insurgency.

To develop a credible military response and to effectively conduct counterinsurgency operations, the JTF must design a viable counterinsurgency force, continue to safeguard the host nation economic infrastructure, protect the population, and promote a positive image of the government among the indigenous people.<sup>11</sup> An important consideration is to minimize JTF involvement by training the local military rather than resorting to active participation by JTF forces, thus respecting and avoiding any cultural dimensions that would be disadvantageous. The planning should center on the doctrine that the JTF military role is one of support to the

host government, thereby improving the legitimacy of both the government and the JTF forces.

Often insurgency objectives can be met or eliminated, or problems can be resolved non-militarily, with political or economic reform, by a negotiated settlement, or simply by providing political recognition. All of these methods may be the means to conflict resolution without the requirement for military operations and outside JTF force involvement.

At the other end of the spectrum, the commander's operational level objectives can range from the physical destruction of the insurgency, ridding the country of the insurgency, or by acting as an honest broker and offering the insurgency the alternative of joining the national efforts to rebuild.<sup>12</sup> The military destruction or neutralization of an insurgency, while concurrently supporting political or economic reform, is difficult, especially for a country's small, untrained, and ill-equipped army.<sup>13</sup> Often lessons learned in previous counterinsurgency operations have been ambiguous and varied, with different lessons learned being drawn from each one of them. The bottom line is every insurgency is different and draws its support from real or perceived inequalities, grievances, heightened frustrations, or cultural bias to outside intervention.

This study of previous lessons points out one primary center of gravity in each insurgency, that of security. The

basic insurgent operational concept is to protect and overcome vulnerabilities while pursuing objectives that promote achievement of the strategic objective. This process involves continuous security, while building strength and support within the country. Attacking this center of gravity requires a strong JTF intelligence effort, particularly in human intelligence, historically a weak link in United States doctrine and practice.<sup>14</sup> The critical factors involved in effective counterinsurgency planning and execution require an emphasis on intelligence, on developing credible government force capabilities supported by JTF mobile training teams, and on establishing both host government and JTF legitimacy in the theater and in the prosecution of counterinsurgency operations.

If all of the commander's attempts at resolution by the application of non-violent means fail, or if measures to establish credible coercion or legitimacy are ineffective, he must then develop an adequate force to deal with the insurgency problem.

### **Force Requirements**

The concept of joint operations in counterinsurgency actions must be closely and critically examined in the formulation of force packages assigned to intervention type operations.<sup>15</sup> The commander, if possible, must focus his efforts on developing the force structure required to address

the insurgency and simultaneously coordinate his efforts with the United States ambassador through the country team.<sup>16</sup>

Military support has far reaching impacts on all elements of national power and cannot be isolated from other aspects of United States policy in the host nation.

The JTF force's role assumes greater importance because the JTF commander may have greater access to and credibility with host nation regimes, particularly if they are dominated by their own militaries.<sup>17</sup> The force structure developed must include conventional forces, but it must also include specialized forces that are properly trained and equipped to fight insurgencies and affect the needed changes within the host nation required to eliminate the source of the conflict.

The force structure will include Special Operations Forces (SOF) with appropriate language and cultural knowledge and skills to assist the host nation in developing a force to confront the insurgency. If additional or direct involvement is deemed appropriate, these "specialized" forces will form the core group to conduct counterinsurgency operations and continue to promote host nation and United States legitimacy.

Key supporting forces will become necessary as the JTF involvement intensifies and includes civil affairs, military police, psychological operations, combat support, and combat service support. Each has a specialized mission and is a force multiplier that helps the host nation regain control and

increase legitimacy with its population. Without the interface of civil affairs and the military police to help improve the local living conditions, public health, and the restoration of order as the insurgency is being addressed, conventional military actions may not be effective in the long term.

Secondly, non-government organizations (NGOs) must be utilized to prevent the stigma of JTF military intervention, while applying economic and political assistance to the nation. Coordination between the NGOs and the JTF is required and mutually beneficial. NGOs are more easily accepted by host nations and contribute significantly to the improvement of economic and social conditions within the country. Lastly, psychological operations (Psyops), combat support, and combat service support are force multipliers that directly support the military effort, help undermine the insurgency, and degrade its legitimacy with the people.

The primary role of forces in counterinsurgency operations is to support, advise, and assist host nation forces through logistics, intelligence, training, and other combat support. If the level of the insurgency is such that the host nation forces cannot effectively counter or control it physically, then JTF forces could be required to engage it militarily. A main objective of the JTF military operation is to help establish a suitable environment to stabilize the host

nation's political, economic, and social institutions until the host nation can again assume these responsibilities. Inappropriate destruction of property and violence inflicted on the people that is attributed to the JTF may reduce legitimacy and undermine the sovereignty of the supported government. JTF participation requires judicious and prudent rules of engagement (ROE) and strict adherence to them at all times.<sup>18</sup>

All planning should include combined operations involving the host nation, United States forces, and other allies. Unilateral combat operations should be avoided down to the tactical level.<sup>19</sup> Once direct intervention is determined to be desirable or necessary, forces must be designed such that they supply the needed combat power but at the lowest unit size possible. They must conduct offensive operations only when necessary, primarily in the role of protection, and avoid the appearance that they are executing a war for a nation that neither has the will nor the public support to defeat the internal threat. An effective intelligence network must be developed. This network must be tied to military counterintelligence elements and security and police services in the area of responsibility. Logistically, additional logistical support should be based at an existing airfield or port infrastructure; the majority of that support should be supplied by the host nation if possible. The reliance on

existing logistics infrastructure reduces the JTF force footprint and limits the negative impact of foreign forces being located outside existing logistics areas.

Lastly, the composition and size of the counterinsurgency force should be based on the level of the host nation's involvement and support, the size of the insurgency force, the size of the geographical area to be controlled and protected, and the type of terrain the force will operate within. There is no pattern or template that lays out force composition or size. Instead the force must be tailored to the existing political, economic, cultural, and military conditions and be directly tied to the end state or strategic objectives desired.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The JTF commander, although seemingly successful in achieving the assigned strategic objective during conventional combat operations, could possibly encounter a tenacious and effective insurgency movement within his area of responsibility. Complicating this task is the lack of United States forces that are specifically trained and qualified to prepare the host nation to counter the insurgency or conduct autonomous operations. This effort involves coordination between the country teams, the host nation, the JTF and all intelligence elements that are available.

The commander must develop innovative operational strategies, concepts, and force structure to employ existing doctrine and tactics to combat insurgency threats within his area of responsibility. Operational planning must support and compliment the political and economic efforts at the National Command Authority and host government levels and be consistent with local cultural sensitivities and military capabilities and requirements. Post conflict rebuilding and support must not be jeopardized by insurgent activities nor can the efforts to quell these activities be allowed to disrupt the rebuilding process. This is truly a double edged sword, any misstep step could lead to failure of the strategic objective.

The JTF commander should have a basic plan in place to address counterinsurgency operations and, if necessary and practical, adjust this operational plan in order to prevent an insurgency from building power or influence. Strong national emotion or cultural opposition to outside intervention must be considered and all attempts made to maintain the legitimacy of the host government and its military, and the JTF force. Without legitimacy, the JTF and host government will simply be considered another imposing power to be resisted.

## NOTES

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